Proposal

to Change the Name of the Protestant Episcopal Church

Diocese of Pennsylvania

1903

Address of Bishop Whitaker

and

Report of Committee

And Convention's Action Thereon

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Extract from Bishop Whitaker's Address to the Diocesan Convention.

Shall the Name of this Church be Changed at this Time?

In the General Convention of 1901, a petition having been presented for a change of the name of this Church, it was Resolved: That a Joint Committee be appointed, consisting of five bishops, five presbyters and five laymen, to take the whole subject of a change of the name of this Church into consideration, to ascertain as far as possible the mind of Church people in general concerning it, and to make report at the next General Convention with such suggestions as may commend themselves to their judgment.

The Joint Committee appointed under this resolution has sent a letter to every bishop of this Church asking that "at the next meeting of the convention or convocation of each diocese or missionary district, said convention or convocation be requested to inform this committee whether it does or does not desire that the name of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America shall be changed at this time, and if it does so desire, what name it wishes substituted therefor."

It is the duty of this Convention to answer this request.

Shall the name of this Church be changed so that it shall no longer be "The Protestant Episcopal Church"?

It is evident that the burden of proof rests upon those who desire a change of name. If no convincing reasons can be given for destroying the title by which this Church has been known in this country and throughout the world ever since it was formally organized and became a part of the visible Church, then it should remain as it is. I do not say "as it ever shall be." That question is not before us. We are asked whether we desire a change of name *at this time.*

I have read carefully every article and argument upon this question that has come within my reach, and have not found in them sufficient reason for changing the name of the Church to which it is our privilege to belong. On the contrary, I have become more fully convinced that a change at this time would be detrimental to our growth and to the promotion of the unity of the Church.

It seems evident that dislike of the word Protestant has much to do with the demand for a change of name. But why should it be disliked? It is said that it expresses opposition instead of affirmation—that it is negative. So are nine of the Ten Commandments. So is the first vow of the Baptismal Covenant. The Holy Scriptures abound with instances of coupling opposition to error with adhesion to the truth. Abhorrence of evil is co-extensive with cleaving to that which is good.

The attitude of mind expressed by the word Protestant is antagonism to false doctrine and wrong practice. It signified that when it was first used in 1529, when a minority of the Diet of Spiers in Germany protested against two measures which had been proposed, and appealed from the judgment of the Diet to the supreme authority of a General Council of the Universal Church.

It is an interesting fact that these two elements, of protest against a wrong action by a portion of the Church, and of appeal to the authority of a General Council of the whole Church, were equally prominent in the first use of this word. It shows that the Reforming Churches were agreed in their recognition of the authority of the Church as a whole. On the one hand they protested negatively against papal usurpations and innovations, and on the other they protested positively their adhesion and submission to the judgment of the Church Universal. Considering the remoteness of the possibility of getting the case of the Reforming Churches before a General Council, and the atrocious persecutions with which all the Reformers were assailed, it is not strange that the element of *appeal* to the voice of the whole Church, which the word Protestant at first contained, was overshadowed by the other element of *protest* against the cruelties and crimes and perversions of truth by the Church of Rome; and so the word Protestant soon came to be

applied to the Reformers in all countries of Europe, and became a symbol of unity among them.

It is not probable that the principles of the Reformation had taken strong hold of the common people of England at the close of the reign of Edward VI in 1553.

It is certain that the accession of Queen Mary and the restoration of the old ceremonies of the Church were generally welcomed. But a deep revulsion of feeling soon came when heretics were tortured and burned to death for their religious opinions; and when Queen Mary died, the whole Romish establishment was swept out of England with almost universal execration. Under Queen Elizabeth there was peace, but across the Channel, during her reign, there was bitter persecution throughout the Netherlands; and within six years, not including the multitudes who perished of exposure, and sickness, and starvation, and the many thousands who were killed in battle, or murdered after their surrender, the Duke of Alva, as the agent of Philip II, boasted that he had sent to death by the sword, the cord and the flames eighteen thousand Protestant heretics.

Then came the awful massacre of St. Bartholomew, when almost the whole community of Huguenots were assassinated in a night for the same crime. England, too, was threatened with a rekindling of the fires of Smithfield; and during the preparation of the great Armada the whole English people were awaiting an invasion which, should its purpose succeed, would mean for them loss of life and faith and freedom; and the whole English nation became intensely Protestant. Even then it was not thought best to change the name of the Church of England; but it was thought well to define the character of its religion; and so it was described by the English Parliament as "The Protestant religion established by law." It was in accordance with this designation that in 1783 Dr. Berkley, son of the Bishop of Boyne, wrote to the Primus of the Scotch bishops, Bishop Kilgour, that " the glory of communicating a Protestant Episcopacy to the united and independent States of America seems reserved for the Scotch bishops." And in reply Bishop Kilgour expressed his "hearty concurrence in the proposal for introducing Protestant Episcopacy into America."

These are the words of the Primus of the Episcopal Church in Scotland.

Thus far it would seem hard to find anything in the history of the word Protestant of which anyone in our communion should be ashamed. And we shall see that the founders of our own Church were not ashamed of it.

It is true that the word has come to be often misapplied. But the same is true of many words whose use should still be retained. It is true emphatically of the word Catholic, which is wrongly applied by the great majority of those who use it.

On the one hand, the word Protestant has been claimed by some to whom it does not belong; and on the other, a studious effort has been made in some quarters to bring about its general application to various forms of unbelief. This has extended so far that, if some other name had been adopted in 1789, and we were now considering whether it would be well to change the title by which we had ever since been called, it might well be doubted whether it would be wise to take our present name. But such hypotheses are idle. This is our name: and to me it seems a better name than any that it has been proposed to substitute for it.

As describing this Church, the word Protestant still means our protest against the erroneous teaching and practice of the Church of Rome. It does not imply that we fail to recognize the body of the Faith which she holds in common with us; nor that we are unwilling to acknowledge that there is much which is admirable in her organization and sagacious in her administration. There are many respects in which we might well follow her example and learn from her. But we should not therefore become blind to her perversions of the truth; her "blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits." She is no nearer to conformity with the teaching of the New Testament than she was two hundred years ago. In all that time she has not receded from one particular of her tyrannous pretensions.

If there were no longer anything in the Roman Catholic Church to justify our protest against her errors, I know not how we as a Church, or as individuals, could justify our continuing in separation from her. But the reasons which were given by the Upper to the Lower Houses of Convocation in

1698 why "the express mention of the Protestant religion should be inserted in the Address" are as applicable now as they were then. They are as follows:

"The express mention of the Protestant religion should be inserted in the Address:

"1st. Because it is the known denomination of the common doctrine of the Western part of Christendom, in opposition to the errors and corruptions of the Church of Rome.

"2d. Because the leaving this out may have ill consequences, and be liable to strange constructions both at home and abroad, among Protestants as well as Papists."

In precisely the same strain wrote the eight Primates and sixty-eight Bishops of the Lambeth Conference of 1867, one hundred and ninety-eight years after the utterance of the Upper House of Convocation. "Furthermore we entreat you to guard yourselves and yours against the growing superstitions and additions with which in these latter days the truth of God hath been overlaid, as otherwise so especially by the pretensions to universal sovereignty over God's heritage, asserted for the See of Rome, and by the practical exaltation of the Blessed Virgin Mary as Mediator in place of her Divine Son, and by the addressing of prayers to her, as intercessor between God and man. Of such beware, we beseech you, knowing that the jealous God giveth not His honor to another."

To the same effect is the "letter to the faithful in Christ Jesus" from the Lambeth Conference of 1878, in which the Archbishops, Bishops Metropolitan, and other Bishops of the Holy Catholic Church in full communion with the Church of England, commend to the faithful the following: "The fact that a solemn *protest* is raised in so many Churches and Christian communities throughout the world against the usurpations of the See of Rome, and against the novel doctrines promulgated by its authority, is a subject for thankfulness to Almighty God. All sympathy is due from the Anglican Church to the Churches and individuals protesting against these errors, and laboring, it may be, under special difficulties from the assaults of unbelief, as well as from the pretensions of Rome."

It is not only against the errors of a single branch of the Church that such utterances as these were directed; but against

all teaching and practice whose tendency is to undermine the foundations of the Faith that was once delivered to the Saints. And that is the spirit of the word protestant. It opposes every manifestation of Anti-Christ. It stands for the truth as the truth is in Jesus. It is a word of which no one who believes in the Deity of Jesus Christ, and who accepts the infallibility of His promise, "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free," need ever be ashamed.

By some who advocate a change of name it has been assumed that the title Protestant Episcopal came into use accidentally or surreptitiously, and that no one knows how or under what circumstances it was adopted, and that there was never any deliberate intention of authorizing its permanent use.

It would be hard to invent a theory farther from the truth than this. The selection of the name Protestant Episcopal was no accident, but a well-considered choice. It was adopted because it expressed what was in the minds of the Churchmen of that time, as to the position which the church occupied, and their conception of her character and purpose. The name Protestant Episcopal had become well known long before it was adopted by the General Convention, as a few citations will show.

In Pennsylvania, May 20, 1778, the "case of the Protestant Episcopal Missionaries of Pennsylvania" was laid before the State authorities.

In Maryland, at a convention in Chestertown, Kent County, November 9, 1780, "On motion of the secretary it was proposed that the Church known in the province as Protestant be called the Protestant Episcopal Church, and it was so adopted."

In 1783 there was adopted a declaration in which the following words occur: "We, the clergy of the Protestant Episcopal Church of Maryland (heretofore denominated the Church of England as by law established)."

In Virginia an act of the General Assembly in 1784 authorized a convention "to regulate all the religious concerns of the Protestant Episcopal Church."

In South Carolina, at a convention held July, 1785, the name was officially recognized.

In New York, at a convention on June 22, 1785, it was

"*Resolved,* That three clerical and three lay delegates be appointed to represent the Protestant Episcopal Church in the State of New York, in the General Convention which is to be held in Philadelphia."

In New Jersey, at a convention held in Christ Church, New Brunswick, July 6, 1785, a resolution was adopted "That the next convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in this State be held at Burlington."

In view of these facts it would be unwarrantable to claim that the official recognition which was given to the name Protestant Episcopal Church by the General Convention in Philadelphia in 1785 was accidental. There can be no doubt that the members of that convention acted intelligently in adopting the resolution "that it be recommended to this Church in the States here represented, that their respective bishops may be called the Rt. Rev. A. B., Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in C. D."

Still stronger is the proof that the members of the General Convention of 1789, which finally adopted the Constitution and thereby fixed the name of the Protestant Episcopal Church, were not acting ignorantly nor carelessly in so doing. For there had been nine years during which the name had been winning its way into the knowledge of Churchmen, and into the language of the people, and the formularies of the Church. "During these nine years, from 1780, when Maryland deliberately voted to assume the name Protestant Episcopal, to 1789 when the Church in three New England States agreed to the Constitution which incorporated it, it came up for adoption or recognition in six Diocesan Conventions, and in five General Conventions, and it was accepted by them all."*

No diocese was divided upon the question of its adoption, and only in Connecticut does there appear to have been a single dissenting individual vote. There were several things in the Constitution which Bishop Seabury wished changed, but he offered no objection to the name of the Protestant Episcopal Church. There is no reason for doubting that its final adop-

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*Acknowledgment is here made to the Rev. John H. Elliott, D.D., for this quotation and to other use made of his pamphlet on this subject.

tion by the General Convention and the several dioceses was deliberate and with full understanding of its significance.

What would be the effect of dropping the word Protestant at this time from the name of this Church? Upon the Roman Catholic Church, probably none whatever. It matters not to her what we call ourselves. The only thing she seeks from us is submission to her authority. It is possible that she might regard dropping the word Protestant as a straw indicating a current of thought moving in that direction; but it is more probable that she would look on in entire indifference.

To many in the Reformed Churches not in communion with us it would give sorrow of heart, because it would be regarded by them as an abandonment of the distinctive principles for which the word historically stands; and it would be considered as emphasizing whatever causes of division there may be between them and us, and of minimizing those points upon which we confessedly agree; and thus it would seem to them a note of separation rather than of unity. By the Old Catholics it might be welcomed as encouraging union between us and them; but this is by no means certain, for their position is a Protestant one, and many of them are favorably disposed towards us now. Indeed, the suggestion has been made by some of them that the name "Protestant Catholic" would be better than any other. I can see no benefit likely to ensue from dropping the name Protestant, but there is danger that it might cause a wider breach than ever between us and our Protestant brethren of other names.

It is said that we owe it to the character of our Church that we should assert our position as a distinctively Catholic body, and that, if we should do so, a great many would at once seek admission to our communion. But from whence would they come? Let us not deceive ourselves by supposing that they would come from the Roman Catholic Church any faster than they are coming now. Let us not imagine that by a change of name we can make the Cross of Christ any less of an offence, or more of an attraction, to the unbelieving men and women in the world around us, whom it is our great duty to seek to win to Christ and His Church, rather than to influence those who are already believing, to a change of their ecclesiastical relations.

Supposing our present name Protestant Episcopal should be dropped, what name is to be adopted in its stead? Upon this point there has been much discussion, but nothing like agreement. It seems probable that a majority of those who desire a change would agree in making the word Catholic a part if not the whole of the name. But what would be gained by this? Our Church here in America has always been Catholic, has never professed any other than the Catholic faith, has never authorized any service without professing faith and allegiance to the whole Catholic body. But incorporating this word into our title would lead to great confusion in the minds of the greater part of the people of this land. Ninety-nine one-hundredths of our newspapers use the word Catholic, whether applied to doctrine, usage or personality, as signifying connection with the Roman Catholic Church. Nineteen twentieths of the people use the word in the same sense. The number of persons in every State of the Union is very large who would understand our adoption of the name Catholic as signifying that we have thereby acknowledged a closer relationship to the Roman Catholic Church than had before been admitted, and not a few would look upon it as a long step towards submission to her authority. It is not improbable that such considerations as these would alienate many of our own members. It is certain that it would check, if not turn altogether away, the present drift of believing Christians towards our own communion. I am sure that for every one person who has remained out of the Protestant Episcopal Church because of its name, Protestant Episcopal, one hundred would be lost to it as the direct consequence of dropping that name, and substituting any other that has been suggested in its place.

For these reasons, and for others which it would tax your time too much to state, I cannot regard any present change of the name of this Church with approval. There is no emergency which demands a change. If there were reason to believe that changing our name would make us better Christians, more earnest, more self-sacrificing, more patient, more considerate of each other's welfare; if the result were likely to be a deepened sense of our responsibility for the evangelization of the world; a great increase of our gifts for the maintenance of the missionary work of the Church, and the consequent extension of the Kingdom of

our Lord Jesus Christ; if there were reason to believe that it would be a step towards the fulfilment of our Lord's Prayer for the unity of His followers, I could contemplate it with satisfaction.

But as I cannot find from careful consideration that it would be likely to promote any one of these results, but rather to hinder them all, I am not in favor of changing the name of this Church at this time.

This part of the Bishop's address, by a vote of the Convention, was referred to a committee of seven, which, on the next morning, made the following report:

Report of the Committee on the Change of Name

The Committee to whom was referred that part of the Bishop's address which treats of the proposal to change at this time the name of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America begs respectfully to report as follows:

The members of the Committee think it unnecessary to express in detail their cordial concurrence in the sentiments which the Bishop has presented so clearly and cogently; but, since the Joint Committee of the General Convention which has this matter in hand is instructed "to ascertain as far as possible the mind of Church people in general concerning it," the members of this Committee are of the opinion that it is their duty to make some brief statement of what they believe to be the mind of the Church people of this historic Diocese, within whose boundaries the present name of the Church was originally adopted.

It is our privilege to observe first of all that, in the consideration of this subject, there is a substantial unity of principle among us notwithstanding the existence of divergent views concerning matters of expediency. In the Diocese of Pennsylvania there is nowhere any question of the catholic character of the Church to which we belong. As the Bishop has well said, "Our Church here in America has always been catholic, has never professed any other than the Catholic faith,

has never authorized any service which does not include a profession of faith and allegiance to the whole Catholic body." Moreover, the minds of all Christian people have been drawn more and more of late years to the consideration of *unity* as an indispensable characteristic of the Body of Christ, and this, in turn, has resulted among ourselves in the growth of a conviction that the divisions with which Christendom is afflicted will never be removed until all Christians shall be ready to come together on the basis of primitive faith and apostolic order which alone can claim to bear the note of Catholicity, since they alone have been held always, and everywhere, by all historic Churches. If there are some who would prefer that the word Protestant should be no longer retained in the name of our National Church, it is chiefly because that name belongs to an age of division, not to the ages of Catholic unity; and, on the other hand, if a large majority of our people are opposed, as we believe, to the dropping of that word, it is to some considerable extent because of a growing appreciation of the Catholic character of the historic protest to which it originally referred.

It is freely conceded that, in so far as the name Protestant, was first applied to a dissenting minority in the German Diet of Spiers, it is a term with which the Anglican Churches have no historical connection. But, in so far as that famous protest included an appeal to a rightly constituted council of the whole Catholic Church, it expressed the ground of unity on which all the catholic reformers of the sixteenth century could stand consistently together in their resistance to the usurpations and corruptions of the papacy; and that same appeal to truly catholic authority is the very ground on which the Church of England planted herself, as a Catholic Church, in the commotions of those times, and which she has consistently maintained to this day. So considered, the word Protestant is much more than a mere negation, since it includes a positive assertion of loyal catholicity; and the positions assumed by the four great conferences of Anglican Bishops which have been held at Lambeth under the presidency of the Archbishops of Canterbury, are practically identical in purport with the original appeal of the Anglican Reformers of the sixteenth century.

If the original catholic significance of the word Protestant had been more clearly borne in mind, and if it had not fallen in popular usage into the purely negative sense of opposition to Rome, it is probable that the present agitation for a change of the name of the Church would not have occurred. Your Committee would therefore briefly state one reason why it is still the duty of our Church to maintain and express an earnest protest against the uncatholic usurpations and pretensions of the Roman See in doctrine not less than in discipline.

Within the last fifty years these pretensions have been exalted beyond all former example: By the promulgation, by the sole authority of the Bishop of Rome, of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin—a doctrine of which the primitive Church never heard, and which the last of the Fathers in the eleventh century indignantly denounced; by summoning as of his own sovereign right the Vatican Council of Latins alone, thus claiming the power to convene an ecumenical council without consent of other Churches; by admitting to that assembly an immense majority of titular bishops and mitred monks, multiplied at discretion to such a number as effectually to suppress bishops having any real jurisdiction; by the promulgation of the dogma of papal infallibility; and yet more recently, by the unfounded assumption of the right to sit in judgment upon the validity of Anglican orders and to declare them absolutely null and void.

It is easy to say that this last declaration, hurled, as it is, directly at our own Church, is a *brutum fulmen* with which we need not concern ourselves. In one sense, so it is. In another sense, however, it is a reassertion of jurisdiction, which we are bound to deny; and it is also an assertion of what we know to be Scripturally, historically and logically false. While the papacy continues to multiply these monstrous aggressions, your Committee can not think it wise for any Anglican Church to discontinue its protest against them.

In the principles above asserted or implied, there is no difference among the members of your Committee, nor as we believe among the clergy or laity of this Diocese. For more than a generation past a general revival of historical studies has been introducing a nobler conception of the corporate unity

of the Church as the Body of Christ than had previously existed; and, hence there has come a growing dislike, not only of divisions, but of names which appear to recognize divisions as permanent conditions in the status of the Church. It would be foolish and unjust to say that this feeling is begotten of the spirit of party. Good men of all parties have felt it, and good men of all parties continue to feel it. That the time will come when the Lord's prayer for the unity of His followers shall be answered, every Christian must devoutly hope, and it cannot be un-Christian or partisan to desire the hastening of that time, or the removal of anything that is believed to hinder its approach.

Your Committee desire to do all brotherly justice to those who differ from them in opinion; but we cannot too emphatically declare our conviction that the people of this Diocese would contemplate any present change of the Church's name with profound aversion. As the Bishop has truly said, "There is no emergency which demands a change." That is a fact which requires no demonstration; but your Committee is further convinced that a change at this time would be generally misunderstood; and that, while it might be attended with deplorable consequences both within and without our own Church, there is no probability of any commensurate advantage as a compensation for these evils.

The foregoing considerations render it unnecessary that we should do more than call attention to the fact, that no name has as yet been suggested, which is not open to at least as many objections as the one we now have. A name savoring of exclusiveness, or of arrogant assumption, would repel rather than attract those whom we would win. It must never be forgotten that this is a Protestant nation, as that word is generally understood, and one might as well attempt to drive back the waves of the ocean as to change by legislation the cherished religious opinions of a great people.

Again, it might be pointed out, were it necessary, that grave legal complications might attend a change of name, unless it were accomplished with practical unanimity. Attempts have been made to belittle this phase of the question, but a diocese like this, which stands in one way or another as trustee for large

amounts of property, cannot regard without serious alarm a project by which so many sacred interests might be endangered.

We have said in an earlier part of this report that there is but little difference of principle between thoughtful men on this subject. It is our duty to add that the unanimity of our own conclusion is largely the result of our conviction that the question under consideration is overshadowed in importance by great problems affecting the extension of the Church and the sanctity of the family. With the world to evangelize and the home to protect, it would be the height of folly to waste our time and energies in sowing seeds of discord and division, over a mere question of nomenclature.

The Committee recommend the adoption of the following:

Resolved, That in the opinion of the Diocese of Pennsylvania, any change of the name of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America at this time would be inexpedient.

JOHN FULTON
HENRY R. PERCIVAL
CHARLES M. ARMSTRONG
J. DE WOLF PERRY
FRANCIS A. LEWIS
GEORGE WHARTON PEPPER
GEORGE C. THOMAS

PHILADELPHIA, May 6, 1903.

On a vote by orders the resolution was carried. Of the Clergy 112 ayes, 34 noes. Of the Parishes 72 ayes, 21 noes, 4 parishes divided.